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AUTHOR	Poveda, David; Palomares-Valera, Manuel; Cano, Ana
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ABSTRACT

The educational memories of 26 Spanish adults between the ages of 50 and 92 years who had attended school between 1921 and 1956 were explored in a narrative analysis. The adults' oral biographies were obtained through semi-structured interviews examining their life experiences and transitions. The participants' grandchildren conducted the interviews as an optional project during an undergraduate-level course on education and development during adult and later life. The participants' schooling was examined as a life transition from a life-span perspective. Although the study participants had attended formal education under very different sociohistorical and political conditions, a number of patterns emerged in their responses when interviewed. On average, the participants spent little time in schools, and most stated that they would have liked to continue their education. The participants' reasons for leaving school and their curricula while in school were organized around gender categories, and their tendency toward early withdrawal from school was linked to the fact that they grew up in rural areas providing adult social roles and occupations that are only partially connected to formal education. The participants showed an orientation toward instrumental and school skills, which they also acquired and expanded in out-of-school contexts. (Seven tables/examples are included. The bibliography lists 16 references.) (MN)

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PUTTING SCHOOL IN ITS PLACE: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL MEMORIES OF ADULT AND ELDER PEOPLE

David Poveda

Manuel Palomares-Valera

and

Ana Cano

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Contact:

Departamento de Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación

Facultad de Psicología

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Campus Cantoblanco

Crta. Colmenar Viejo Km. 15

28049 Madrid

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D. Poveda

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Abstract

This paper analyzes narratives regarding educational experiences and memories of a group of adult and elder Spanish participants. Data was gathered through life history interviews, most often by the grandchildren of the participants. Schooling is examined as a life-transition from a life-span perspective. While the participants of the study attended formal education under very different socio-historical and political conditions, a number of patterns emerge in the data. First, participants on average spent little time in schools, yet overall would have liked to continue their education. Both the reasons to leave school and the curriculum in schools are organized around gender categories. Second, the implications of early school withdrawal are contextualized in the rural context in which participants grew up and which provided adult social roles and occupations that were only partially connected to formal education. Third, participants show an orientation towards instrumental and school skills, which are also acquired and expanded in out-of-school contexts. The findings are discussed in relation to general theories of development in later life and situated in historical context.

Keywords: Aging - Narrative Analysis - Gender - Schooling - Life-Span Development

Introduction

When human beings make sense of their experiences through narrative, they take advantage of the two central resources that characterize this form of discourse. First, events are organized temporally, whether in chronological order (in parallel to the original events; Labov, 1972) or reorganized anachronically for different rhetorical purposes (Capps and Ochs, 2001). Second, events are evaluated, storytellers present their stance towards narrated experiences and provide an affective grid to interpret the actions recapitulated in narratives. Developmental studies have become increasingly interested in the role of narrative in the construction of the life course. The relevance of this configuration is captured both in classic statements of life-span developmental psychology (Neugarten, 1996) and in the most recent work in cultural psychology (Bruner, 2002).

From a life-span perspective, broadly considered as a perspective that studies life events and developments during 'wide' periods of time, an explicit focus on narrative allows an examination of central questions of life-long development. It is both a stereotypical attribution and a relevant psychological trait of late adulthood and ageing that individuals spend a good deal of their discursive resources remembering, reflecting on and retelling past experiences in the process of constructing their own life course. These reconstructions play a key role in the construction of the self and its sense of agency at different moments of the life-course, including the narrators present (Neugarten, 1996). The selective and organizational nature of narrative activity facilitates the identification of key events and transitions in the life-course (Settersten and Mayer, 1997), as these are made explicit or indirectly elaborated in conversations about the past, life history narratives and other forms of reminiscing. Further, the evaluation and interpretation of these inflexion points form part of their narration, and this evaluative stance is a process that in itself changes during the life-course (Grob, Krings and Bangerter, 2001).

In this context, narratives about schooling are particularly relevant, since it is a trait of modern societies that one's experiences in the formal educational system determine many of the opportunities and affordances that will become available in the life-course. As such, biographical studies of experiences in school have been of central interest for the historical study of education and also for ethnographic educational research projects. However, schooling as a developmental transition is also of importance for some of the classic concerns of life-span developmental psychology (Baltes, Reese and Lipsit, 1980), as it can be used to explore simultaneously *normative age-graded influences* (schooling is often a compulsory and universal experience organized around chronological criteria), *normative history-graded influences* (educational practices and policies change through time providing different experiences to successive cohorts of students) and *non-normative events* (individual's experiences in schools are unique and its effects cannot be reduced to sociological profiles or statistical tendencies).

The purpose of this paper is precisely to examine a set of narratives about schooling combining strategies derived from narrative analysis with some of the general concerns of a life-span perspective applied to development in later life. The data source is a set of oral biographical interviews about schooling obtained from late adult and elder Spanish participants. As we will see, the total sample of participants comprises quite a heterogeneous group in terms of age and the socio-historical conditions under which they attended school - given the multiple changes that have taken place in Spanish history during the twentieth century. Yet, a number of common narrative themes emerge regarding how schooling is retrospectively incorporated in the life-course and how this incorporation is interpreted. The recollection and analysis of our materials have proceeded in an inductive and open-ended fashion, but as sets of narratives have been examined, certain topics have emerged as relevant. Specifically, the present study attempts to answer three research questions: (a) overall, how is school remembered and assessed, (b) how

many participants consider their schooling excessively brief and how is this brevity explained and interpreted and, (c) in what terms do participants talk about the acquisition and display of schooled knowledge ('general culture') or instrumental skills (literacy and numeracy) in out-of-school contexts.

Our approach to narrative is primarily contextualist (Bauman, 1986). At a proximal level, we take the interviews from which our data is extracted to be collaborative accomplishments in which interlocutors contribute to build an oral biography in particular directions as a product of turn by turn developments in the narrative conversation (Edwards, 1997). At a more distal level, this unfolding is mediated by the shared histories and kinship ties of interlocutors that transcend the particular interview session and are also embedded in larger social and historical transformations that configure the intergenerational relations and transformations that affect these conversational partners (see discussion below).

With these theoretical considerations in mind, the present study focuses primarily on the content, and its organization, of the educational biographies that we have collected. To do so, narratives have been edited and organized following conventions and strategies developed in ethnopoetics (Hymes, 1996) and stanza analysis (Gee, 1996). These approaches see narratives as organized and purposeful forms of discourse and use tools and terms derived from poetics and literary analysis to edit transcripts. Specifically, it considers lines/verses as the basic unit of discursive activity and groups these into stanzas according to both content and rhetorical criteria. Superficial patterning in the narrative, through parallelisms and different stylistic figures, is used as an interpretive key to identify themes and significant events in the narrators life story.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study are twenty-six adult and elder individuals (seventeen female and nine male participants). The majority were raised and currently live in different villages or small cities of mid-western Spain, an interior region of the country that is mostly rural and closely tied to primary economic sectors. Basic descriptive information of the participants (including an advancement of the most descriptive results available from interviews) is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Descriptive information on participants

Participants	Central tendency		Range
Current age in years	mean:	72	50-92
Years of schooling	mean:	4.2	0-9
Age during schooling in years	median:	9.5	5-14
Period of schooling (year date)	mode:	1930-1937	1921-1956

Procedure

Given the contextualist approach outlined above, it follows that we consider the form of our data to be closely tied to the particular conditions under which it was obtained and the analytical lens through which it has been examined. Therefore, the procedures of the study and its implications will be discussed at some length.

The oral biographies were obtained through semi-structured interviews on life-experiences and transitions made by undergraduate students as an optional project in a course on education and development during adult and later life. In the majority of cases, students interviewed their own grandparents or other older family members. Interviews could cover participant's full life span or focus on specific periods or events of participant's life. In the first case, discussions about school, when they appear, are only one part of the interview and, in the

second case, schooling has been a frequent topic of more focused interviews (for example, experiences during the Spanish Civil War are another frequent focal topic). With participant's consent the interview materials (audio or video recordings and transcriptions) are archived and made available for analysis in successive years. In this study we use as our database a subset of biographies comprised by the interviews monographically centered on educational experiences and the segments of life-span biographies that refer to the time spent in formal education or that participants thematically tie to this period.

Most obviously, that participant and interviewer have kinship ties and a close relationship facilitates constructing a relaxed and informal situation for the interview and biographical conversation. However, the specific family configuration of the interview has more significant consequences for the conversational situation and the narrative that emerges from it. First, it is an instance of *intergenerational communication* (cf. Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991; Grob, Krings and Bangerter, 2001) in which the elder interlocutor frequently takes as his or her task making the socio-historical conditions under which his or her schooling took place (and thus the consequences it has had and the potential difference with current times) comprehensible to the younger interlocutor.

Second, it is an instance of *intrafamilial communication* in which interlocutors partially share a life-history and kin identification. As a result, often the main events and content of the interviews are already partially known to the interviewer, and the interview is precisely designed to elaborate on themes that have already been established as relevant in the interviewee's life-span. More importantly, in this family context, educational experiences are an especially visible topic, since most of the interviewers are members of the first generation to reach higher education and, further, their chosen field of study and work is education-related. In this context, narrators build as their task presenting themselves favorably in this transition (cf. Labov, 1972), by playing

a role in it or highlighting other paths to 'school-like learning'. They also point-out and the responsibilities that accompany the opportunities that have been granted to the younger interlocutor.

In short, we believe that several aspects of the research questions emerge from the narrative themes that develop in our data and that these themes are closely intertwined with the specific conditions under which the narrative interviews take place.

Results

General assessment of schooling as a life-transition

The most basic conclusion that can be extracted from the interviews relates to the overall quality of the school memories that participants produce. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority state in clear terms whether school was a pleasant experience or an unpleasant experience, and only a minority of the narratives do not evaluate explicitly the period of time spent in formal education.

Table 2: Assessment of time spent inside school

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	16	62
Negative	3	11
Polarized	2	8
No Assessment	5	19
Total	26	100

As we saw in Table 1, participants in our study spent, on average, very few years in school. It is in this context that a majority of positive memories about school and elaborate explanations about leaving school emerge as relevant - see the following sub-section. The minority of negative recollections are directly related to unpleasant experiences with teachers who made use of physical punishment and other forms of intimidation, not uncommon practices

in the time period that is being discussed. In turn, 'polarized assessments' refer to narratives in which both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are reported, precisely because different teachers with opposite forms of relating to students are recalled. In the following example, J.G; a 78 year old male describes in successive extracts different teachers whose behavior towards the students was quite different (stanzas and lines are numbered consecutively although fragments have been omitted):

Example 1: Polarized assessments[1]

Stanza 1: Summary
1 maestros había de todos
2 había algunos que eran más compasivos
3 no pegaban tanto
4 pero algunos

Stanza 2: First teacher
5 el primero que fui se llamaba Don Ángel
6 pero le decían de apodo 'rabieta'
7 porque estiraba del pelo de atrás y de las orejas
8 cuando no nos sabíamos la lección y todas esas cosas
9 le temíamos mucho

Stanza 3: Second teacher
10 y luego al morir aquel
11 ya pasamos a otro maestro que le decían Don Francisco
12 que aquel fue un maestro muy bueno
13 pero resulta que él llevaba to' el cargo del pueblo
14 era maestro era el alcalde era el secretario
15 él lo dominaba todo
16 aquel era más serio
17 aquel tenía un puntero de carrasca
18 y cuando alguno hacia alguna cosa
19 pues nos daba algún punterazo que otro
(...)

Stanza 4: Fourth teacher
20 luego ya este fue cuando la guerra
21 antes de la guerra o a principios de guerra
22 vino uno de Alcalá de la Vega
23 un tal Don Julián que fue un buen maestro
24 ese hombre enseñaba
25 era mu' caritativo
26 y un hombre muy buena persona
27 y muy listo
28 era pequeño pero era mu' grande

English translation:

Stanza 1: Summary

1 teachers there were of all kinds
2 there were some that were compassionate
3 they did not hit too much
4 but some

Stanza 2: First teacher

5 the first I went was called Mr. Angel
6 but they called him as a nickname 'tantrums'
7 because he pulled your hair from behind and from the ears
8 when we did not know our lesson and all those things
9 we feared him very much

Stanza 3: Second teacher

10 and later when he died
11 we then went to another teacher that was called Mr. Francisco
12 that that one was a very good teacher
13 but it turned out that he was in charge of the whole town
14 he was a teacher he was the mayor he was the clerk
15 he dominated everything
16 that one was more serious
17 that one had an 'oak cane'
18 and when someone did something
19 well he would hit us 'once in a while' with the cane
(...)

Stanza 4: Fourth teacher

20 later this one was when the war
21 before the war or at the beginning of the war
22 came one from Alcalá de la Vega ((village name))
23 a certain Mr. Julian who was a good teacher
24 that man taught
25 he vas ve'ry 'charitative'
26 and a man a very good person
27 and very smart
28 he was small but he was' very big

In this fragment, J.G. successively describes and assesses the behavior of different teachers. His evaluation is graded starting with the teacher that produced more fear in the children and caused more reticence to schooling and ends with the most appreciated teacher both for his behavior towards the students and his skill as an educator. The opposition between the first and the last highlights the dissociation that the narrator produces when describing his second teacher. In this case, the teacher is recalled in positive terms as an educator and an authority figure in the

community (given the different political and administrative responsibilities that he held in the locality) even if he did punish physically his students 'sporadically'.

The disassociation between the narrator's stance regarding teachers' capacity as educators and their behavior towards children is especially revealing in terms of life-span narratives. Within the historical periods in which our participants were schooled, physical punishment by teachers was part of their 'normative' behavior, even if the legislative status of these actions was not clearly articulated. In consequence, it could be argued that a retrospective narrative that attempts to recover the ideological and moral order of the original period of the narrative events can produce different evaluative statements in contrast to a retrospective narrative that reinterprets events from the ideological and moral standpoint of the narrator's present. Further, in this matrix, the narrator can construe him or herself in different positions regarding present views about past events, past views about past events (or even possibly past views about present events, although this type of narrative is not produced in our data). In other words, narrators can portray themselves with their assessments as broadly 'ahead of their times' or 'progressive', 'conventional' or 'conservative'. In this case, we would seem to have a somewhat conventional participant who does not question openly teacher's use of physical punishment (a hardly defensible position in contemporary times) and can still assess positively teacher's capacities regardless of their use of physical punishment. How narrators explicitly articulate different ideological orders regarding each of the time frames involved in the telling (the narrators present and the narrative past, cf. Bauman, 1986) will emerge as a powerful element in the narrative themes that will be discussed below.

The combination of a short schooling history, explicitly perceived as brief, and that this experience is most often recalled in positive terms sets the stage for what is, in fact, the principal story topic that is elaborated in the narratives: the process of abandoning school and the

development of a 'counter-narrative' on the consequences of schooling and the acquisition of 'school knowledge'. The construction of these narratives opens a window to the social and economic order in which participants were raised, and to the role formal education played in this system. Gender appears as a central element in this configuration, since it determines the total amount of years that will be allocated to formal education, the school curriculum and the role that this curriculum plays in students insertion into adult life and responsibilities. In the following sub-headings we will successively examine narratives that develop the interrelationship between gender and schooling and narratives that discuss alternative spaces for the acquisition of 'school skills and knowledge'.

Learning in school, leaving school and gender

The most obvious way in which gender emerges as a relevant category is in how families saw formal education as a different kind of investment for their sons and daughters. For the male children, education could be a path to professional and economic development, while for female students education was a transitory period during which some basic skills could be acquired to eventually become a house-wife or help adult women in the family. In consequence, girls left school earlier; if choices had to be made as to who could continue studying (given economic constraints) male offspring would be the desired choice and in all these decisions children themselves had little say. In their stories, participants (especially female participants) are not indifferent to these dispositions The narrative provided by P.M, a 51 year old female, is one of most clear cases in which this social order is contested and reassessed through time:

Example 2: Abandoning school and gender

Stanza 1: My siblings and school

1 empezamos a ir a la escuela
2 a mí me gustaba mucho
3 a mi hermana menos

4 y al chico no le gustaba nada
5 iba muy a gusto
6 y a mí me gustaba mucho mucho

Stanza 2: My school years
7 pues era pequeña tenía me parece cinco años
8 porque no quería ir a las clases de mayores que estaba mi hermana
9 pero me tuve que quedar en parvulitos por entonces
9 pero me tuve que quedar en parvulitos por entonces
10 porque mi edad era más pequeña que la de mi hermana
11 y al año siguiente pasé a la otra clase de parvulitos
12 entonces no había pues más que la clase de parvulitos y la otra mayor para todos
13 y en fin ya estuve así hasta los doce años en la escuela

Stanza 3: Leaving school
14 que a los doce años pues ya me quitaron de la escuela
15 yo no quería me causó un disgusto muy grande
16 a mí me gustaba mucho la escuela
17 pero como decían que era chica
18 pues tenía que estar en casa con mi madre ayudando
19 y además que tenía que ganar
25 así que me pusieron a bordar en una máquina
26 y nada y así estuve muchos años hasta que me casé

Stanza 4: My brother's school years
27 mi hermano estuvo yendo a la escuela
28 pero no le gustaba nada ir a la escuela
29 no le gustaba nada ir a la escuela
30 hacía novillos
31 como era chico
32 y por entonces los varones parecían ellos los que tenían que estudiar
33 los que tenían que saber cosas
34 porque las chicas teníamos que estar con su madre a trabajar
35 y ganar para la dote
36 pero la casa la casa era la casa

Stanza 5: My brother leaves school
37 y bueno a mi hermano lo apuntaron en una escuela particular
39 pero también hacía novillos
40 y no iba no quería y faltaba
41 mi padre quería que a toda costa que su hijo estudiara
42 y que fuera un hombre de bien en la vida
43 nosotras como éramos chicas no
44 tenía que ser ayudarle a su madre en la casa
45 y aprender a hacer las cosas de la casa
46 y ya está
47 así que pues pues luego por fin mi hermano
48 pues eso tampoco estudió
49 y se tuvieron que dar por vencidos
50 y lo tuvieron que quitar de la escuela porque no sacaba las cosas
51 porque no quería así es que

Stanza 6: Retrospective assessments
52 por entonces no te dabas bien cuenta
53 porque el entorno en que vivías más o menos era así
54 pues decía pues que las mujeres
55 sólo pensabas que te gustaba mucho estudiar

56 que quisiera seguir estudiando
57 ya de mi edad empezaban algunas amigas a estudiar magisterio
58 estudiaban aquí en el pueblo
59 aquí sacaban bachiller
60 y te daba envidia
61 ya empezaban a salir chicas estudiantes
62 que por entonces estudiaban pocas
63 y claro lo echabas de menos
64 pero no te dabas bien cuenta de lo que en sí era
65 luego al pasar los años es cuando lo has ido sintiendo más
66 te daba envidia
67 veías cosas
68 y así

English translation:

Stanza 1: My siblings and school
1 we started to go to school
2 I liked it very much
3 my sister liked it less
4 and the boy did not like it at all
5 I went happily
6 and I liked it very very much

Stanza 2: My school years
7 well I was small I was I think five years old
8 because I did not want to go to the older class where my sister was
9 but I had to stay in kindergarten then
10 because my age I was smaller than my sister
11 and the following year I went to the other kindergarten class
12 at the time there was only the kindergarten class and the other one for all the older children
13 and well I was like that in school until I was twelve years old

Stanza 3: Leaving school
14 that when I was twelve well they already took me out of school
15 I did not want to it made me very upset
16 I liked school very much
17 but since they said that I was a girl
18 well I had to be at home with my mother helping
19 and I also had to make an earning
25 so they put me to sow with a machine
26 and nothing and I was like that for many years until I got married

Stanza 4: My brother's school years
27 my brother went to school (for some time)
28 but he did not like at all going to school
29 he did not like at all going to school
30 he 'skipped classes'
31 since he was a boy
32 and at the time men seemed to be the ones that had to study
33 the ones that had to know things
34 because the girls we had to be with your mothers to work
35 and 'earn (money)' for the dowry
36 but 'the house' 'the house' was 'the house'

Stanza 5: My brother leaves school

37 and well my brother was signed up to a private school
39 but he also 'skipped classes'
40 and he did not go he did not want to and he missed (classes)
41 my father wanted that at all costs his son studied
42 and that he (became) a 'successful and respected man' in life
43 us since we were girls no
44 it had to be help your mother at home
45 and learn to do the things of home
46 and that's it
47 so that then then later finally my brother
48 well that he did not study either
49 and they had to give up
50 and they had to take him out of school because he did not 'do well'
51 because he did not want so 'that is that'

Stanza 6: Retrospective assessments

52 back then you didn't realize too much
53 because the environment in which you lived was more or less like that
54 well it said that well that women
55 you only thought that you liked very much to study
56 that I would like to continue studying
57 already at my age some friends started to study 'teacher education'
58 they studied here in the town
59 here they got their 'secondary school degree'
60 and they made you jealous
61 then we 'started to see' some women studying
62 that back then only a few (girls) studied
63 and of course you missed it
64 but at the time you did not realize completely of what this (really) was
65 then when the years go by is when you start to regret it more
66 you were jealous
67 you saw things
68 and like that

In this narrative, P.M. provides a vivid and articulate account of her experiences as a female student and how her expectations were subordinated to her family's demands and her brother's privileges. The telling proceeds by unfolding its elements and preparing the stage for the closing retrospective evaluation of the reported events. Stanza 1 introduces the characters of the story and Stanzas 2-3 present P.M's own experiences in school and the circumstances surrounding her removal from school. Then the narrative turns to her brother's experiences, and P.M builds two stanzas (Stanzas 4-5), that parallel her own account, in which her brother's experiences in school and the state of affairs that facilitated her brother leaving school are

described. The *initiating event* (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph and Smith, 1992) of this part of the narrative is the aggravated discrimination that P.M. felt (and feels) between herself, who wanted to study and liked going to school but was nevertheless 'forced' to leave school, and her brother, who did not want to study and did not like to go to school but was nevertheless given several opportunities until it became clear that he would not complete his formal education.

This contrast is closely interwoven in the rhetorical design of the narrative. As stated, at the broadest level Stanzas 2-3 and Stanzas 4-5 form two symmetrical and opposing pairs describing the personal experiences of P.M and her brother - individual protagonists. However, within and across these stanzas a more general opposition and critique of gender roles is established. This opposition is developed in successive arguments of lines that progressively embed each other. In Stanza 3 (lines 17-19) the role of girls in general is presented and used to 'explain' P.M's school leaving. In Stanza 4, (lines 31-33) the role of boys in general is presented in contrast to the above - note the parallel constructions that introduce each explanation: *como decían que era chica* 'since they said I was a girl' (line 17) vs. *como era chico* 'since he was a boy' (line 31). However, this new argument is again contrasted immediately with information on girl's roles (lines 34-36) recycling much of the information that was presented above. Further, in the final Stanzas, in which her brother's school abandoning is presented, this contrast is again explicitly articulated (lines 41-42 vs. lines 43-45).

In terms of retrospective assessments, this narrative also illustrates the different alternatives that have been outlined above. It should be noted that the interview did not seek to explore explicitly notions regarding gender roles. However, in the processes of explaining her forced withdrawal from school, these categories emerge as central in the participant's story. The final Stanza of the narrative elaborates her stance towards different ideologies, both at the time and currently. First, the 'conventional' ideology of the time is presented (lines 52-54), which is

used to mitigate somewhat her reactions at the time - and these are expressed as a personal reaction that does not make any connections with other social processes (lines 52, 55 and 56). Second, a more 'progressive' alternative available at the time is presented (an alternative that, obviously, was not contemplated positively by her family) (lines 57-59 and 61-62), accompanied by her own emotive reactions at the time (lines 60 and 63). Finally, a retrospective evaluation of these events as her life-course continued is elaborated (lines 64-68), in which she positions herself with one of the available alternatives and begins to forward some awareness of the social categories and ideologies involved (albeit cryptically: *no te dabas bien cuenta de lo que en sí era* ' at the time you did not realize completely of what this [really] was, line 64). From a historical perspective, this information regarding the educational conditions of rural girls and women in the Spanish fifties is not surprising news (Flecha, 1989). What is relevant for our discussion, and will be elaborated in the conclusions, is how gender discrimination is explicitly articulated by some female participants and how this situation has played a central role in the configuration of their identity.

A parallel theme that emerges in the above narrative is how the instruction received at school is related to possible roles and skills to be deployed in adult life. In the story we see how there were alternative paths available for each gender that did require continued formal education (teacher education, further education in the professions) - not pursued by any of the protagonists of the narrative. However, our data shows that the majority of our participants did not complete many years of education. In the rural socio-economic context of our study, the consequences of this unsuccessful schooling seem to be mitigated by the fact that there were other available (and traditionally sanctioned) adult roles and economic positions in the community, and for these positions schooling only played a partial role. Gender again articulates the place the school curriculum occupies in this transition to adulthood, a curriculum that is designed with the

expectation that the majority of students will not move beyond primary education. As it also is known, the curriculum (and often classes and schools themselves) was gender segregated with male and female students receiving instruction in different content areas appropriate for their expected responsibilities in life. In this context, participants see the curriculum as playing different roles in relation to their future adult life. For male participants, future work was in 'the fields' (agriculture and farming), and for female participants, future work was in housekeeping. To meet these demands, schools designed different strategies for girls and boys. For girls, the curriculum included explicit instruction in different house tasks (sewing, cooking). For boys, schools provided opportunities for students to go directly to the fields and acquire by practice future agricultural and farming skills. In other words, female students acquired skills decontextualized from their actual site of application and their achievements were only relevant inside the educational institution, while male students acquired their knowledge through actual work in ongoing agricultural and farming activities. The contrasting brief narratives of T.R. (female, 86 years of age) and J.T. (male, 78 years of age) illustrate this clearly (the lines of both narratives are numbered continuously to facilitate the discussion):

Examples 3: The Curriculum and gender

Girl's curriculum

1 Sólo de chicas
2 por la mañana teníamos la clase
3 y por la tarde nos dedicábamos nada más a la costura
4 y estando cosiendo estábamos cantando la tabla
5 que eso es muy bonito
6 cantábamos la tabla
7 y así aprendíamos la tabla cantando
8 y nos era muy fácil
9 porque la aprendíamos cantando
10 y luego estábamos cosiendo
11 hacíamos todo a la vez
12 por la tarde no teníamos mas clase que la costura

English Translation:

1 Only for girls
2 during the morning we had class
3 and in the afternoon we only dedicated ourselves to sewing
4 and while we were sewing we were singing the (multiplication) tables
5 that it is very pretty
6 we sang the (multiplication) table
7 and like that we learnt the (multiplication) table singing
8 and it was very easy (for us)
9 because we learned singing
10 and then we were sewing
11 we did everything at the same time
12 in the evening the only class we had was sewing

Boy's curriculum

13 Pues a los seis años empezamos a ir hasta los catorce
14 pero en aquellos tiempos en aquellos tiempos
(...)
15 más al campo que al otros sitios
16 me mandaban regar los huertos y todo eso
17 y a coger aceitunas
18 a coger las olivas
19 y todos íbamos cuando estaba lloviendo o nevando
20 y nos decía el maestro
21 "ya están aquí los del temporal"
(...)
22 después de la guerra ya pues tenía doce años
23 cuando la guerra y ya pues a esa entonces a esa edad
24 a la escuela ya a la escuela no
25 al campo al campo

English translation:

13 Well at six years of age we started to go until fourteen (years of age)
14 but in those days in those days
(...)
15 more to the fields than to other places
16 I was sent to water the vegetable gardens and all that
17 and to pick 'olives'
18 to pick the olives
19 and we all went when it was raining or snowing
20 and the teacher would say to us
21 "the storm (people) are already here"
(...)
22 after the war already then I was twelve years old
23 when the war and already then at that age 'then' at that age
24 to school to school no
25 to the fields to the fields

As advanced, in T.R's narrative we see girls practicing sewing in class as a complement to learning and drilling the multiplication tables. Both activities are recalled in positive terms

(line 5), but the narrative (and other interviews) do not make explicit that the students were actually sewing anything that would be used later outside of school - rather they practiced 'patterns' and different kind of 'stitches'. The result is a portrait of school in which the curriculum is detached from later life. In contrast, in J.T's story we see how male students had direct contact with agricultural work and participated productively in it (including the perils of working outdoors, line 19). As a result, there is a much continuous transition between the life-stages at school and at work (lines 15 and 25). From a historical perspective, it should be noted that it has been argued that in the very different political periods that are reflected in our data (II Spanish Republic, Spanish Civil War and the first decades of Franco`s dictatorship) the educational policies and ideologies especially designed for rural schools and environments varied significantly (Hernández, 2000). However, in the recollections of our participants, regardless of the political period, formal education seems to have similar roles in the social system. It is expected to be a brief experience that will prepare, through different means, male and female students for their distinct adult roles in a rural social system.

The connection between in-and-out of school learning sites that is reflected in one of the above narratives relates to the last theme that emerges in our data as a counter-account of the process of early de-schooling: the acquisition and display of instrumental skills outside of formal education.

Literacy and numeracy outside of school

We suggested in the procedure section that participants present narrative portraits of themselves as oriented positively to the knowledge and skills that are acquired through formal education, even if their experience in the system has been brief. One of the main strategies to develop this topic is by presenting alternative paths through which these skills are acquired and alternative sites in which it is relevant to display them. The basic instrumental skills, literacy and

numeracy, are the most salient goals of schooling. Their acquisition is an educational goal and, for participants, their mastery is connected to further acquisitions and displays of competence. Literacy allows participants to gain new knowledge about the world through print and books and numeracy allows participants to face everyday challenges in which numerical operations are necessary (in everyday economic transactions, promotions at work, etc.). In the narratives there are two general storylines about how these skills are acquired and deployed. In the first plot, participants have had very little (or null) formal education and, therefore, literacy and numeracy are completely (or mostly) acquired outside of school. In the second plot, participants have had a longer experience with school, where basic literacy and numeracy are acquired, but these skills are expanded or gain new meaning through life experiences outside of school. The following fragments, by S.L. (male, 72 years of age) and M.P. (female, 80 years of age), show how mathematics and reading, respectively, were acquired outside of school by participants with a very brief or non-existent school experience:

Examples 4: The acquisition of instrumental skills outside of school

Numeracy

1 Luego también tenía a mi abuelo
2 también me enseñaba
3 cuando sólo sabía sumar
4 me puso la tabla de multiplicar en la pared
5 y me dijo que cuanto tiempo iba a tardar en aprenderla
6 lo cual yo lo hice con mi hijo

English translation:

1 Then I also had my grandfather
2 he also taught me
3 when I only knew how to add
4 he wrote the multiplication table on the wall
5 and told me that how long was I going to take to learn it
6 which I did with my son

Literacy

Stanza 1: Introduction
7 Yo al colegio no he ido nunca
8 me quedé sin padre a los cinco años
9 y no me llevaron a la escuela

Stanza 2: Learning to read
10 lo poquito que sé
11 es porque me gusta mucho leer
12 y mi madre me enseño
13 ¡claro! a deletrear
14 y es lo único que sé

Stanza 3: Current literacy
15 cuando hay una palabra un poquito 'intríngulis'
16 ¡al diccionario!
17 y si no se lo pregunto a una vecina

English translation:

Stanza 1: Introduction
7 To school I have never gone
8 I lost my father when I was five years of age
9 and they did not take me to school

Stanza 2: Learning to read
10 the little I know
11 is because I like to read very much
12 and my mother taught me
13 of course! to spell
14 and that is all I know

Stanza 3: Current literacy
15 when there is a word a litttle bit 'special'
16 to the dictionary!
17 and if not I ask a neighbor

In these narratives we see how full sets of skills are acquired outside of school. S.L went to school between 4 and 8 years of age, where he learned how to add, but he was taught to multiply by his g dfather at home (even if the brief story reports a most peculiar pedagogical approach). The second narrative is told by a participant who did not attend school at all, but in her brief account she provides information on the role of literacy during her life course: how it was taught by her mother (lines 12-13), how literacy has played a role in the acquisition of the (little) knowledge she has (lines 10-11) and how she solves her current literacy demands, with other

print materials (lines 16) or with support from other social actors (line 17) - 'the neighbor' is the interviewer, a relationship they have had for years.

The second plot outlined above is illustrated in the following examples, in which participants report acquiring instrumental skills through formal education but assign new meaning to these acquisitions in alternative contexts. J.L. (male, 82 year of age), reports on the uses he gave to literacy and M.N. (female, 66 years of age) discusses the role that mathematics has had in her adult life (both fragments are only one segment of larger narratives in which participants elaborate on specific episodes that illustrate the relevance of the skills they are discussing):

Examples 5: The expansion of instrumental skills outside of school

Literacy

(...)
en el campo como yo siempre estaba leyendo
le enseñe a leer a otro chico
que este aprendía muy deprisa
¡tenía que ser muy inteligente!
en la escuela leíamos escribíamos y hacíamos cuentas
pero había otros que llevaban más asignaturas historia ciencias
yo sólo iba a la escuela a aprender lo básico
y después a trabajar para poder comer
aunque a mí me hubiese gustado haber seguido estudiando
pero aun así yo al campo me llevaba mis libros para leer
(...)

English translation:

(...)
in the fields since I was always reading
I taught another kid to read
that this one learned very fast
he must have been very intelligent!
in school we read wrote and we did some 'mathematics'
but there were others that had more courses history science
I only went to school to learn the basics
and then to work to be able to eat
although I would have liked to continue studying
but even so to the fields I took my books to read
(...)

Numeracy

(...)
Stanza 1: Introduction
11 a mí las matemáticas
12 vamos que no me gustaban que no me gustaban
13 estudiaba porque no tenía más remedio
14 pero y ¿sabes cuándo me empecé a interesar?

15 sobre todo por el tanto por ciento y eso
16 bueno lo había estudiao'
17 después de casada
(...)

Stanza 2: Explanation
18 porque vas a comprar
19 y como es tu dinero
20 pues te interesa saber lo que te cobran y lo que no te cobran
21 yo de soltera me mandaban a comprar
22 "toma dinero, cuánto, bdbdbddb"
23 pues no me preocupaba si me costaba más si me costaba menos
24 pero luego como era mi dinero
(...)

English translation:

(...)
Stanza 1: Introduction
11 me mathematics
12 well that I did not like them that I did not like them
13 I studied because I had no choice
14 but and do you know when I began to get interested?

15 mostly in percentages and that
16 well I had studied it'
17 after getting married
(...)

Stanza 2: Explanation
18 because you go shopping
19 and since it is your money
20 well you are interested in knowing what you are being charged and what you are not being charged
21 I when I was single they sent me shopping
22 "here have money, how much, bdbdbddb"
23 well it did not worry me if it cost more or it cost less
24 but later since it was my money
(...)

In contrast to the previous reports, in these narratives participants acknowledge the role that schooling has played in the acquisition of basic skills. However, their account reflects how these skills are transformed during the life course. J.L. explains how he acquired basic mechanical literacy in school but used these abilities to read and acquire knowledge through

reading books outside of school: at home (not transcribed) and in the fields, where he also taught another peer, who did not attend school, to read. It should be noted, that several of the narratives of participants who worked in charge of animals (shepherds), as opposed to agricultural work, report having quite an amount of spare time to read and peer teach and learn while working. M.N's account is even more significant, since her stance towards mathematics as a domain is transformed radically in each context of use. While in school it was a dispreferred subject (lines 12-13) as an adult, when applying them to manage her own economy, she becomes interested and competent in them. The rest of the narrative (not transcribed) is a succession of episodes in which M.N. was shopping and was able to discover mistakes in the calculations of the vendors, which she pointed out and corrected.

To summarize the results, we have a set of narratives of personal experiences about school by a group of adult and elder participants who spent few years in the formal educational system but, nevertheless, recall these experiences in positive terms. Under these circumstances, favored by the interview setting itself, participants provide an alternative account regarding the effects and meanings of schooling. These alternative narratives provide, on one hand, information on the social system (regarding gender politics, economic context and demands) that precipitated an early school abandonment and, on the other, a portrait of participants orientation towards the skills and knowledge that traditionally are associated with formal education. From a socio-historical perspective, it can be considered that the narratives provide first-hand testimonies of the conditions and circumstance under which schooling took place in key moments of Spain's recent history. From a psychological-developmental perspective, the narratives open a window to understand the role that schooling has played in the construction of participants life-trajectories and identities. To build a fuller historical account of the interviews we would need information and methodologies that have not been uptaken in this study. Therefore, in the conclusions we will

turn to discuss some of the implications that can be drawn from our data from a life-span perspective, although we will do so without disregarding the historical information that is available in the narratives and other bibliographical sources.

Conclusions

Participants' narrative accounts can be examined from two standpoints regarding life-span development. Each standpoint provides information, broadly speaking, on corresponding aspects that have been of traditional concern for this approach to human development. First, the narratives report events and stances that are located in the (distant) past, thus a 'comparison' with contemporary interpretations of comparable events (e.g. regarding how students enter, stay and leave school and with what consequences), would give us indirect evidence of possible cohort differences and historical changes affecting human development (Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt, 1980; Grob, Krings and Bangerter, 2001). Second, even though the narratives report past events, participants present their contemporary views on these events and, thus provide information on their current ideologies and concerns. This aspect is relevant for our understanding of psychological development in later life. Further, since as we explained above, it is possible to disentangle different positions that may be seen as 'progressive', 'conventional' or 'conservative', our data may be relevant to contest or modify stereotypical (and academic) descriptions of aging as a process in which social actors become increasingly conservative and resistant to change. In these conclusions we will attempt to engage with a selection of concerns of each stand-point.

Different pieces of our data highlight the relevance of gender categories throughout the life-span and later life. These findings are relevant for our understanding of gender relations during late adulthood and elder life (Paoletti, 1998). Some of our participants, more the younger female (Example 2), showed a critical awareness of gender asymmetries during their life-course, especially as these relate to the opportunities afforded by schooling. What is relevant is that this

consciousness is continued and further developed during later life, a process that should help question portraits of elders as disengaging with the external social order or conformist with traditional social roles. However, this assertion also needs to be contextualized. On one hand, male participants are much less articulate than female participants of these gender inequalities, which, after all, is not an especially surprising finding. On the other hand, while these processes are clearly pointed out when discussing early school abandonment (which was an undesired outcome for both male and female participants), it is not articulated at all in relation to different 'gendered' curriculums. Regarding different content learning, both male and female participants overall recall in positive terms their experiences in gendered school activities and do not show any contemporary re-assessments of the effects of these differences (Examples 3).

This last observation should be put in historical context, which brings us to discuss some of the socio-historical constraints that have affected the developmental trajectories of our participants. The first point relates to the net consequences of schooling. As suggested above, the potentially problematic effects of such brief contact with formal education are somewhat mitigated by the availability of sanctioned and stable adult roles in the community which are only partially tied to academic credentials and skills. Most participants come from and have worked in rural environments in occupations closely tied to farming or agriculture (and housekeeping in the case of women). In practice, schools already made provisions for this and incorporated these roles into their curriculum (Examples 3). Further, even when participants consider that they did not acquire or appreciate sufficiently the most basic academic skills provided by schools (literacy and numeracy), they report alternative paths through which these have been expanded in rural out-of-school contexts and community roles (Examples 4 and 5). The later can be seen as part of the broad stance that participants provide as 'oriented towards culture and learning', and that we have

argued is directly related to the intergenerational configurations and educational histories of the families of our participants - as described in the method section.

Finally, the stories of how participants entered and left school also show a potential change in how education is conceived in itself in relation to the child. Supposedly, in contemporary times (in Western industrialized societies) education is seen as an individual right of the child, guaranteed by the state and, on occasions, independent from the wishes of the minor and her or his family. In contrast, in the case of our narratives, decisions about schooling are clearly collective and take into consideration external constraints, family needs and even decisions regarding which offspring will be able to continue their schooling and which will not.

In conclusion, the narratives we have collected provide rich account about schooling in Spain's later first half of the twentieth century. This information is no doubt potentially relevant for historical studies of education. Yet, the narratives also provide information on the life-trajectories of our participants, the place that school has in these paths, and the role that education and 'schooled culture' have in their past and present identities.

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Notes

1. Transcripts are organized into lines using idea units and prosodic boundaries as starting criteria. False starts, repetitions and self-corrections have been omitted but are considered in the organization of lines. Recurrent discourse markers, conjunctions and different rhetorical strategies are used to re-organize lines into more compact structures. Stanzas are grouped according to semantic criteria, although they are most often also marked by prosodic and interactional boundaries. Titles have been added to guide analysis and comprehension. A translation into English appears below the original Spanish transcript. Translation has been as literal as possible, with sentence structures and phraseology transformed minimally.

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